

Theft From Store

A boy stole a computer game from a large store.

*Following a meeting, the Store Manager offered
the offender a work experience placement*

Robert stole a computer game from a large store in town. Having recently left his job, he had intended to sell the game to get cash. As he had a Final Warning for a previous offence, he had to appear in court for the first time, and received a Referral Order. As part of this, he was referred to the victimoffender mediation service, which undertook preparations with victims and offenders for panel meetings. The mediator contacted the victim, who had taken part in (indirect) mediation before and was pleased to have the opportunity to be involved again. The mediator had also contacted Robert, prior to the referral panel date, during which, it was discovered that a close relative had died the previous day. She notified his Youth Offending Team worker so that they could offer support and encouragement. It was important to ensure that Robert didn't feel so overwhelmed that he didn't turn up for the panel meeting, now that the victim had made special arrangements to be present. The mediator met the victim to discuss the panel procedure and what sort of reparation work (if any) was sought. At the referral panel, the victim explained the cost of theft to stores nationally and how the knock-on effect meant fewer jobs and higher prices. She also spoke of the risk to the staff, as they were unable to tell, when tackling a shoplifter, whether any weapons or syringes were being carried. She said what a gamble this was for everyone, but particularly for a 16-year-old Saturday person, earning just £4.50 per hour. Robert apologised to the Store Manager and told her how embarrassed he was and how he had been 'shamed up' in front of his mates. He said it wouldn't happen again. He spoke of his ambition to work in the RAF and realised that that would be impossible with a criminal record. Accompanying Robert was a Princes Trust worker, Carol, who explained to the panel how Robert was engaged on a 12 week course with them. She gave a detailed account of the competition for each place on the course and told them how well Robert was doing. She informed the panel that the next step in the course was for Robert to work full-time for two weeks in a local business. The victim had decided that she wanted a window painted in the store as the reparation work. However, when she learnt of Robert's involvement with the Princes' Trust, she immediately offered him a 2 week work placement at the shop. She said she had made up her mind within 5 minutes of meeting Robert, that he was a decent lad who had made a mistake that he was now sorry about. The panel agreed to make it a special

case and allowed him to do it. Robert was delighted. The chair of the panel stressed to him the importance of behaving in the shop and that a lot of people were putting their faith in him. He said he wouldn't let any one down. Before he left, Robert shook every one's hands and thanked them. The mediator made sure that the victim didn't feel under pressure to offer the 2 week placement, but she confirmed that, on the contrary, she was pleased to have the chance to help Robert. She felt 2 weeks might be long enough to impress on him how the shop operated and in any case, she wasn't short of work that needed doing. She hoped that by allowing Robert to do his reparation work at the place of the offence, he would feel pride in the shop, thus preventing re-offending. Convicted shoplifters are normally banned from the victim's shop so she was really showing great generosity on her part. The mediator contacted the store manager during the 2 week placement to ensure everything was going well. The victim was pleased with Robert's work, in fact the arrangement had gone so well, she wanted to write a job reference for him. A successful conclusion!

The panel members spoke of it being 'the best panel' they had attended, as it was so constructive and communication had been so open and forthcoming. A relationship of confidence and trust had been nurtured between the victim and the victim-offender mediation service, which led to the willingness of the victim to partake in a 3rd case.